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What Is a Listening Prayer and Is It Biblical?

Sixbert SANGWA • August 17, 2024

Prayer is a vital aspect of the Christian faith, a sacred communication between believers and God. The Bible provides numerous teachings on prayer, guiding us in how we should approach God and what we should seek in our prayers. However, there is a contemporary practice known as *"listening prayer"* that raises questions about its biblical validity. This practice involves spending time in prayer talking to the Lord and then waiting silently to *"hear"* His response. The question we must ask is whether this practice aligns with biblical teachings.

The Concept of Listening Prayer

Listening prayer is founded on the belief that prayer is a two-way communication with God—we speak to Him, and He speaks back to us in a direct, personal manner. Proponents of this practice often cite verses like Psalm 46:10, *"Be still, and know that I am God,"* and John 10:27, *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."* These verses are interpreted to suggest that we should spend time in silence, waiting to hear God's voice in response to our prayers.

Some go further, referencing Jesus' words in John 7:16, *"My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me,"* as evidence that even Jesus engaged in listening prayer. They argue that this was how Jesus received His teachings directly from the Father, implying that Christians today should also seek direct, personal messages from God through listening prayer.

The Biblical Context of Listening Prayer

It is important to carefully examine the verses often used to support listening prayer. In Psalm 46:10, the command to *"be still"* is not specifically about prayer but about recognizing God's sovereignty and trusting in His power. It is an invitation to cease striving and acknowledge God's control over all things, rather than an instruction to engage in silent meditation to hear God's voice.

Similarly, John 10:27 speaks of the relationship between Jesus and His followers, highlighting their recognition of His voice through faith and obedience. This verse emphasizes the ongoing relationship between Christ and believers, rooted in the teachings of Scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, not in direct, verbal communication through a practice like listening prayer.

The claim that Jesus practiced listening prayer, based on John 7:16, is also a misunderstanding of the text. Jesus was speaking of His divine authority and the origin of His teachings, not describing a method of prayer. His unity with the Father allowed Him to perfectly represent God's will, but this is not an endorsement of a mystical practice of listening for new revelations.

The Dangers of Listening Prayer

One of the most concerning aspects of listening prayer is the potential for self-delusion or even demonic deception. The Bible warns us against relying on our own understanding or subjective experiences as authoritative (Proverbs 3:5-6). While Scripture is inspired by God and fully authoritative (2 Timothy 3:16), the thoughts, feelings, or intuitions we experience during listening prayer cannot be placed on the same level as the written Word of God.

Listening prayer encourages believers to *"clear their minds"* and wait passively for divine messages. However, the Bible does not instruct us to empty our minds as a means of spiritual communication. Instead, we are called to meditate on God's Word (Psalm 1:2) and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds through Scripture (Romans 12:2). The idea of receiving new revelations through listening prayer bypasses the objective truth of Scripture, opening the door to subjective interpretations and potentially dangerous spiritual influences.

The practice of listening prayer shares similarities with New Age and occult practices, which often involve meditation, visualization, and seeking personal revelations. These practices are contrary to biblical prayer, which is rooted in faith, submission to God's will, and the study of His revealed Word.

Biblical Prayer and Its Foundation

Biblical prayer is distinct from listening prayer in several key ways. It is grounded in faith (James 1:6) and involves direct communication with God, acknowledging His sovereignty and seeking His will. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, saying, *"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'"* (Matthew 6:9-10). This model prayer emphasizes reverence, submission, and a focus on God's will rather than our desires.

Throughout Scripture, prayer is described in terms of beseeching the Lord (Psalm 118:25), pouring out one's soul before Him (1 Samuel 1:15), crying out to heaven (2 Chronicles 32:20), and kneeling before the Father (Ephesians 3:14). These descriptions highlight the active, intentional nature of prayer, where believers earnestly seek God's presence and guidance, fully engaging their hearts and minds.

Moreover, the Bible warns against adding to God's Word or seeking new revelations beyond what has been given. Revelation 22:18 states, *"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll."* The sufficiency of Scripture is clear—it contains all we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Therefore, seeking additional, personal revelations through listening prayer is both unnecessary and unbiblical.

Conclusion

While the idea of listening prayer may seem appealing as a way to feel closer to God or receive direct guidance, it ultimately strays from biblical teachings. Prayer, according to Scripture, is a means of communicating our hearts to God, aligning ourselves with His will, and seeking His guidance through the wisdom He has already provided in His Word.
As Christians, we are called to study the Bible diligently, to meditate on its truths, and to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us through the Word. As Psalm 119:105 declares, *"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."* We are to trust in the sufficiency of Scripture, relying on God's revealed Word as our ultimate authority in all matters of faith and practice.
Rather than seeking new revelations through listening prayer, we should devote ourselves to understanding and applying the rich, complete, and living Word of God, which equips us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17). In doing so, we honor God, safeguard our faith, and grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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